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ABSTRACT

Curriculum practices of northwest Ohio school districts are described in this exploratory study. Thirty-one out of 33 superintendents responded to a questionnaire that collected information on the following: administrative responsibility for curriculum management; the curriculum review and management process; public relations practices; curriculum improvement needs; constructive practices; and influences on curriculum. Findings are used to construct a prototype district profile, in which curriculum management occurs by comparing actual curriculum practices to instructional standards and student outcomes. Districts identify reform legislation needs as most pressing and improved teacher involvement as their most important accomplishment. Strongest influences on curriculum, excluding teachers, include state mandates, tests, and textbooks. Information will be used to design a more carefully controlled national study. (LMI)

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The University of Toledo
College of Education and Allied Professions

CURRICULUM MANAGEMENT IN 29 SCHOOL DISTRICTS IN NORTHWEST OHIO

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A Report
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REPORT TO PARTICIPANTS
IN
CURRICULUM MANAGEMENT STUDY

INTRODUCTION

On November 7th, 33 superintendents in Northwest Ohio were asked to complete a questionnaire about curriculum practices in their districts. The districts were selected because of their proximity to the University of Toledo. There were different kinds of districts of different sizes and wealth among those receiving the questionnaire.

The study was exploratory and no firm conclusions can be drawn from the results. The information obtained will be used in the design of another survey instrument to be used in a more carefully controlled study of a representative sample of superintendents throughout the nation.

Respondents were requested to return the forms by December 1. No follow up of any kind was attempted. On December 6th, thirty-one responses had been received. The results of the survey follow in the same order as the questions appeared on the form.

1. **Who (position title) is most directly concerned with curriculum management and renewal in your district?**

In answer to this question respondents identified fifteen different job titles. Only three reported that "superintendents" were most directly concerned with curriculum and one of these might possibly be acting in another capacity as he is also principal of both the elementary and high school in his district. Another responded "Superintendent/Principal."

The variety of titles supplied was interesting. Shakespeare told us that a rose by any other name would smell as sweet, but the combined titles of some of the positions suggest some of the "roses" on doubling or tripling as sugar beets or soy beans (Director of Instruction and State/Federal Programs, Director of Curriculum and Certified Personnel, etc.). So, not surprisingly, few districts have the resources to assign a person full-time to curriculum leadership. Only two districts reported a curriculum director without an additional portfolio attached.

When the titles of curriculum leaders are put in like-sounding categories the distribution is:

Directors of all kinds	9
Supervisors of all kinds	7
Principals	7
Superintendents	3
Other Central Office	3
Assistant Superintendent	2
Administrative Assistant	1

The important, but not surprising, finding yielded by this question is that rarely (3) do superintendents believe that they can personally be the person in their district most directly concerned with curriculum management and renewal.

2. **How do you keep your curriculum current? Who is involved in this process?**

There was almost a consensus response to this question. Most respondents reported practices something like the following:

> "The curriculum is kept current through a rotation system. We study a different subject each year in a five year cycle. The county office staff (supervisors), teachers, principals and superintendent as well as parents and children are involved in the curriculum change process. The county office staff gathers the materials and advises the staff who in turn consider the views of students and the needs of students and views of parents. It is an ongoing process."

Variations on this process included involving additional parties in the process and sometimes limiting the process to district professionals only. The respondents were answering this question in terms of the state minimum standards for elementary and secondary education.

Another way of interpreting this question was to indicate how the district attempted to keep their curriculum current all the time regardless of the required five-year cycle. A response of this type was:

> "•Professional articles, research
> •Conferences
> •Meetings with principals and supervisors
> •Teacher inservice and attendance at workshops and conferences
> •All professional staff"

Only three respondents interpreted this question in this way, but this suggests that in future this question may need to be broken down into separate parts dealing with the required, regular process and the day-by-day response to new developments as well. The second way of viewing this question has implications for staff development.

3. **How is your curriculum managed?**

The answers to this question were most helpful. They demonstrate the utility of pilot studies in general and the need for clarity in surveys in particular. In brief, "curriculum management" was a poor choice of words. Apparently there is not a common perception of what the term means.

Respondents tried to be helpful, but clearly this is a bad item. The most common interpretation is represented by the following response:

> "Currently curriculum is managed through course of study objectives being correlated with objectives in teacher lesson plans. Building principals do this. We are beginning a new management process where test items are developed for course of study objectives. We want to do this first in the CBE areas of reading, math and English Composition. This will add uniformity to our curriculum management process, and also will improve the match between what we actually teach (instruction) and what our courses of study say we teach (curriculum)."

In general, answers to this question dealt with processes concerned with accountability and supervision. Perhaps the most telling response come from one superintendent: "Not very well." More likely the question was not put very

well.

4. **How does your district communicate with all of the groups concerned with the curriculum (i.e., the board, administrators, teachers, parents, community, news media, legislature)?**

Respondents found it easy (perhaps too easy) to understand this question. A representative's, carefully considered response was?

> "Parents are involved in evaluating via questionnaire, committee representation, and school improvement councils. Communication channels include printed information, school newspapers, district reports and news releases, open houses, group meetings as well as informal discussions."

Another respondent, perhaps a bit irked at being asked an apparently obvious question, or perhaps tongue in cheek responded with multiple choices:

> "A. As little as possible!
> B. Whenever we have to!
> C. Whenever we are asked!
> D. All of the above?"

That this response is not meant entirely in jest is suggested by another, a director, who answers succinctly and seriously:

> "On a one-to one basis as questions arise."

Finally, another candid respondent, not the superintendent who confided "not very well" in question 3, but another superintendent, confides sadly: "very poorly."

So, in this simplistic probe we have revealed some difference in opinion about whether sparse, ad hoc, communication or frequent, routine communication is best. There was also some apparent frustration at the interest of the media in the extra curricular over the curricular. We were reminded of the channels of communication by the majority of respondents who also favored full and frequent communication.

5. **In your opinion, what is the most pressing curriculum improvement need in your district?**

As expected, there was great variety in the answers to this question. Since this information will be of greatest interest to readers, the responses will be listed as received without any attempt to analyze or categorize them. We begin with the only exception - - those few instances of multiple similar responses:

- "meeting all of the new state mandates" (4)
- "Something that will help our kids pass the proficiency tests." (4)
- "money" (3)
- ". . . adequate staff development time for teachers to participate in this process as valued professionals. Currently they are expected work after school, on Saturday mornings or interrupt their classroom instruction and prepare for a substitute during released time."
- "Developing continuity between all grade levels."
- "Variable curriculums at the gifted end of the spectrum."
- "Our math curriculum is outdated along with staff attitude."
- "Moving all curriculum from facts to problem solving and critical thinking by instructors."

- "Math and language arts."

- "We need to make some adjustments in our junior high school curriculum and staffing. For many years, we have operated what is, in effect, a six-year high school. We need to establish a definite curriculum and staffing changes that move us toward a separate junior high school approach."

- "A discussion of where standardized testing fits in with our increasing commitment to competency testing. An overall commitment on the part of teachers and administrators to the hands-on teaching approach in science, mathematics and language (whole language; writing process)."

- "Development of technology needs and inservice of teachers on the use of technology to enhance and improve instruction."

- "There is pressure from employers about students who do not have minimum skills. I guess we have to look at our curriculum and the needs of business/employers to see what specific skills high school students need to become employable."

- "Technology."

- "Computer literacy"

- "Advanced placement programs"

- "Remedial reading."

- "Time to do the job curriculum development deserves. I would also like to see a requirement that every teacher complete <u>at least</u> one course emphasizing curriculum <u>development</u> (not history)."

- "Advanced high school courses. Foreign language in elementary/junior high school."

- "For improving the process rather than the product, perhaps we need to

include students or a business advisory committee for input with the course study revision."

- "Effectively communicating and (maybe) formalizing the importance of teamwork and commitment to team results, and necessity of people showing up for school (work) every day."

- "There are two pressing needs. These are: (1) the need to improve the writing ability of our students and the skills and confidence of our teachers to meet this need, (2) the need to develop test-items directly related to our course of study objectives and place these items and the course of study in a computer program."

- "More periods per day in the secondary schools are needed to allow more subjects to be taught and learned. Study halls could certainly be eliminated to insure student opportunity to learn every period of the day."

Actually the two categories with 4 each should be merged making eight the number of respondents indicating greatest concern for meeting state mandates as enforced by testing. Most of the other items seem clearly responsive to the powerful social pressures and wide-spread discontent so generously reported in the media.

6. **What is the most constructive thing that has happened in your district's curriculum during the last five years?**

This question was the most productive. Several respondents supplied exhibits to supplement their remarks. An edited version of the list of accomplishments follows. Apparent repetitions of the same item are marked by an asterisk:

- Implementation of the LMS computer program to manage curriculum
- Use of laser disc technology in science and social studies.

- Hired an administrator with direct responsibility for curriculum.

- A course of study has become an all inclusive document since it contains locally developed PPO's; 9th and 12th grade proficiencies with a program integration correlation; and grade level correlates for the CAT Test Form E.

- Expansion of curricular offerings.

- Whole language approach. *

- Programs to enhance student self esteem.

- Teachers designed an intervention program. *

- Revised every curricular offering and purchased new textbooks and workshops to match academic areas.

- Matching curriculum objectives to our testing program.

- Established a computer lab room with 18 IBM's. More computer courses. Fourth grade takes key boarding. *

- Publication of curriculum guides for parents.

- Completion of courses of study and supplements. Inservice for teachers for effective use of courses of study.

- Expansion of developmental kindergarten. *

- Implementation of "Math Their Way." *

- Textbook money budgeted and actually spent on textbooks.

- CBE standard in place district-wide.

- Keeping teachers exited about innovation. *

- Two curriculum directors employed.

- Graduation requirements raised to twenty units.
- Developed an annual composition test for grades 1-6, 8 and 10 and score it locally.
- Offering TESA training to all teachers.
- Improved our teacher evaluation instrument and structured it to bear directly on curriculum and instruction.
- Success of LAP program.
- An interdisciplinary American Studies course.
- Revised American History for grades 8 and 9.

If superintendents wish to discuss some of these accomplishments with their authors, we will make this information available. The list reveals the impact of reform legislation as well as the availability of new technology and techniques. Several items underscore the need for staff development.

7. **Rate the following in terms of their influence on curriculum with "1" meaning little or none and "5" meaning a great deal:**

Textbooks	_____	State mandates	_____
Tests	_____	Parents	_____
Professional Associations	_____	Experts	_____
Taxpayers	_____	Others: (please identify)	_____

First of all, this item revealed a problem with the questionnaire. Directions asked respondents to rate items form "1" to "5". No mention was made of the importance of entering some rating for each item. When some items were ignored it was decided not to count them at all but merely to reduce the divisor when computing the average. Perhaps respondents meant an item was of no importance when they skipped it. In this case we should have given them a rating of "1".

The items and mean and rank order score, for each, follow:

	$\bar{X}$	Rank
Textbooks	3.42	3
Tests	3.68	2
Professional Association	2.46	6
Taxpayers	2.34	7
State Mandates	4.13	1
Parents	2.85	5
Experts	2.96	4

The range for all items was from "1" to "5". Eight respondents added "Teachers" to the list, all rating them "5".

Analysis of this item supports data entered throughout these several questions. We can now structure a profile of a mythical, "typical" school district's curriculum processes.

Prototype District Profile

Curriculum leadership is provided most often by directors with various titles, but sometimes by supervisors and principals. The curriculum is kept current by study and revision on a five-year cycle, taking up the several subjects in rotation. The supervisors from the county office assist local district teachers and administrators in this process. Most curriculum review committees are made up of professional educators but a growing number of districts are including representatives of other role groups (e.g. parents, community, students). All districts secure information from other groups in the curriculum renewal process.

The curriculum is managed by monitoring the several aspects of instruction to see that there is a clear relationship between what is supposed to be taught, what is taught, and what is tested (and learned).

Districts communicate with the public and interested agencies and groups in all the usual means using existing media supplemented by their own productions. A few districts keep communication to a necessary minimum, but the majority communicate freely and fully.

The most pressing curriculum improvement needs in the districts were directly related to "reform" legislation. Districts are attempting to provide staff development for their teachers in the hope that this will enable students to perform well on proficiency tests thus meeting various state mandates.

Districts take pride in a variety of accomplishments. Most frequently noted are implementing a whole language program, establishing intervention teams,

securing and utilizing computers, providing developmental kindergartens and "Math Their Way" programs and, most important, keeping teachers involved and motivated.

The most important influences on the curriculum (aside from teachers) are state mandates, tests, and textbooks.